

Message Text

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SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY RESCUED THREE INDUSTRIALISTS IN ANTIOQUIA, THUS FREEING THAT DEPARTMENT FROM KIDNAP VICTIMS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY MONTHS. COLOMBIA HOSTED A MEETING OF EQUATORIAL NATIONS TO ESTABLISH A POLICY ON ORBITAL SPACE. THE CONGRESS PASSED PRESIDENT LOPEZ' PROPOSAL TO CONVENE A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY. THE MEASURE MUST BE APPROVED AGAIN NEXT YEAR. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, OR AT LEAST PART OF IT, HELD A CONVENTION DECEMBER 3. ALTHOUGH HARSH WORDS ARE BEING EXCHANGED BETWEEN FACTION LEADERS, THE PARTY WILL PROBABLY GET BACK TOGETHER BY THE 1978 ELECTIONS. PANAMA'S LEADER TORRIJOS PAID A BRIEF, PRIVATE VISIT TO CALI. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED NEW CONTROLS ON SERVICE EARNINGS IN ORDER TO CHECK THE INFLOW OF DOLLARS. BOGOTA HAS INITIATED SEVERAL MEASURES TO MAKE THE CITY SAFER. END SUMMARY.

2. KIDNAP VICTIMS FREED BY ARMY. THREE COLOMBIAN INDUSTRIALISTS, KIDNAPPED 4 SEPTEMBER BY MEMBERS OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION ARMY (EPL), WERE FREED ON 9 DECEMBER WHEN AN ARMY PATROL

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SURPRISED THE KIDNAPPERS IN RURAL NORTHERN ANTIQUIA PROVINCE.

ALTHOUGH ALL THE EPL MEMBERS ESCAPED, OTHER ARMY PATROLS ARE ATTEMPTING TO LOCATE THEM. THE THREE INDUSTRIALISTS WERE THE LAST OF 14 KNOWN KIDNAP VICTIMS IN ANTIOQUIA PROVINCE IN 1976, ALL OTHERS HAVING BEEN RELEASED PREVIOUSLY OR KILLED BY THEIR CAPTORS.

3. MEETING ON GEOSYNCHRONOUS SATELITES. COLOMBIA HOSTED A MEETING ENDING DECEMBER 4 OF EQUATORIAL COUNTRIES TO ADOPT A COMMON POLICY CONCERNING ORBITAL SPACE OVER THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. THE POLICY IS IN CONFLICT WITH THE USG POSITION ON THIS ISSUE (BOGOTA 11894). ACCORDING TO FONOFF OFFICIAL JOAQUIN FONSECA, BRAZIL, WHICH WAS PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER, EARLIER RENOUNCED ITS PROJECT TO LOCATE A SATELLITE IN STATIONARY ORBIT OVER COLOMBIA (BOGOTA 12169).

4. CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL APPROVED IN FIRST ROUND. PRESIDENT LOPEZ' PROPOSAL TO CONVENE A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY TO REFORM THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND THE DEPARTMENTS (STATES) AND TO SEPARATE THE CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WAS APPROVED BY AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES ON DECEMBER 9, THUS COMPLETING ITS FIRST GO AROUND. THE CONGRESS MUST APPROVE THE INITIATIVE AGAIN NEXT YEAR BEFORE IT COMES INTO FORCE (BOGOTA A-107). SHOULD THE PROPOSAL PASS ITS SECOND TEST, CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN EARLY FEBRUARY 1978 AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WOULD FOLLOW IN JUNE 1978. THE VARIOUS FACTIONS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY HAVE AGREED TO USE THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS AS A SORT OF PRIMARY. UNDER THE TERMS OF THE SO-CALLED SAN CARLOS PACT, SIGNED EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE PARTY LEADERS AGREED THAT THEY WOULD PRESENT SEPARATE SLATES OF CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES HEADED BY THE SEVERAL PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRANTS. THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WHO GAINS THE MAJORITY OF THE PARTY'S CONGRESSIONAL SEATS IS SUPPOSEDLY ASSURED OF RECEIVING THE NOMINATION DURING A CONVENTION TO BE HELD BETWEEN FEBRUARY AND JUNE.

5. CONSERVATIVES SPLIT. THE OSPINA-PASTRANA WING OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY JOINED BY A SMALL SO-CALLED PROGRESSIVE GROUP HELD A CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONVENTION DECEMBER 3. THEY ELECTED A NEW PARTY LEADERSHIP, WHICH LATER NAMED SENATOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RODRIGO LLOREDA CAICEDO, OF THE CALI EL PAIS NEWSPAPER FAMILY, AS PARTY PRESIDENT. FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ALVARO GOMEZ AND HIS FOLLOWERS DID NOT ATTEND THE CONVENTION FOLLOWING THEIR FAILURE TO GET A PRE-CONVENTION AGREEMENT WITH THE OTHERS ON THE MAKE-UP OF THE NEW LEADERSHIP. THE FACTIONS SUBSEQUENTLY HAVE EXCHANGED HEATED WORDS OVER THE LEGITIMACY OF THE CONVENTION, WITH EACH CLAIMING TO BE THE AUTHENTIC SPOKESMAN OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY PRINCIPLES. WHILE THE DIVISION LOOKS SERIOUS NOW, MOST

OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE PARTY WILL GET BAK TOGETHER IN TIME FOR THE 1978 ELECTIONS (BOGOTA 12087).

6. TORRIJOS VISITS COLOMBIA AGAIN. PANAMANIAN STRONG MAN OMAR TORRIJOS, WHO HAS A HABIT OF SHOWING UP IN COLOMBIA UNEXPECTEDLY, PAID A SURPRISE VISIT TO THE CALI AREA ON DECEMBER 8. THE VISIT WAS STRICTLY PERSONAL. TORRIJOS HAS RELATIVES AND FRIENDS IN CALI (BOGOTA 12211).

7. SERVICE EARNINGS CONTROLLED. IN AN EFFORT TO CONTROL THE INFLOW OF DOLLARS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED NEW CONTROLS ON SERVICE EARNINGS. BEGINNING DECEMBER 6, 1976, PERSONS WHO EXCHANGE OVER \$500 OF SERVICE EARNINGS WILL HAVE TO ACCOUNT FOR THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE IN DETAIL; EXCHANGE OF FROM \$1,000 TO \$20,000 WILL BE PAID IN EXCHANGE CERTIFICATES AND OPERATIONS FOR MORE THAN \$20,000 WILL HAVE TO HAVE PRIOR APPROVAL FROM THE BANK OF THE REPUBLIC. SINCE 1974 SERVICE EARNINGS HAVE BECOME A MAJOR SOURCE OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE INCOME AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALLOWED COLOMBIANS TO EXCHANGE, WITH FEW QUESTIONS ASKED, LARGE AMOUNTS OF DOLLARS AT THE BANK OF THE REPUBLIC. THESE EARNINGS TOTALED ONLY \$74 MILLION IN 1974, BUT ARE ON THEIR WAY TO \$700 MILLION IN 1976. THE PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF THE DOLLAR PURCHASES IS THE SURPLUS ON THE BLACK MARKET. THIS EXCESS DEMAND FOR PESOS IN THE BLACK MARKET HAS ITS ORIGIN IN A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT HAVE CHANGED SINCE 1974 WHEN THE SITUATION WAS JUST THE REVERSE. (BOGOTA 12146).

8. SPECIAL SECURITY MEASURES FOR BOGOTA. IN ORDER TO MAKE BOGOTA STREETS SAFER, ESPECIALLY DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON, NEW BOGOTA MAYOR BERNARDO GAITAN MAHECHA, HAS ENLISTED THE MILITARY TO AUGMENT THE NORMAL POLICE FORCE. THE MILITARY WILL PATROL THE STREETS IN CERTAIN AREAS OF REPORTED HIGH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CRIME RATES. THE MAYOR ALSO PROHIBITED THE SALE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AFTER MID-NIGHT ON WEEK DAYS, AND 2 AM ON WEEK ENDS, IN ORDER TO CUT DOWN ON THE NUMBER OF ACCIDENTS CAUSED BY DRUNKEN DRIVERS. FINALLY, THE MAYOR HAS DECIDED TO PUNISH BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS WHICH BUY MERCHANDISE FROM THIEVES WHO PROWL THE BOGOTA STREETS. GAITAN THUS HOPES TO REMOVE THE MARKET FOR STOLEN ITEMS WHICH, HE OPTIMISTICALLY SAYS, SHOULD LEAD TO A REDUCTION IN THEFTS. DREXLER

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